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A northwest suburban agency that helps domestic violence victims and other women in need opened a new emergency shelter last year with room for about 45 women and children.

But the shelter, in an industrial area of Rolling Meadows, has operated at no more than half its capacity because the not-for-profit Women in Need Growing Stronger, or WINGS, is waiting for \$675,000 in state money promised in 2002.

The Palatine-based group faced the possibility that it would have to reduce its services until U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) came to the rescue with a \$200,000 federal grant, announced Tuesday.

Women and children typically stay at the 15,000-square-foot safe house for three to four weeks until they can get orders of protection or until they can safely move out on their own. Then they are given transitional housing by WINGS or other agencies, said Rebecca Darr, WINGS executive director.

The emergency shelter has enough living space to accommodate 15 women and about 30 children. It also has a nurse's station, a playroom and a computer lab for women searching for jobs.

What it needs, Darr said, is money to hire additional staff.

Eight full-time and four part-time employees run the 24-hour facility.

With the state funding, the agency would hire additional support staff to counsel domestic violence victims and help them legally separate themselves from their abusers.

"We can't have women and children coming and staying if we don't have staff to support them," Darr said.

The shelter opened in January 2005. It was half-full within three weeks and has remained that way since. Often staff members have had to refer victims to other agencies, Darr said.

The federal grant, she said, "is going to help us continue at the rate we're at now."

It costs \$1 million a year to run the facility.

Kirk said he sought federal funding from the Department of Justice to help WINGS provide a local solution for suburban domestic violence victims.

"We have about 20,000 women in the northwest suburbs who need these sort of services," Kirk said. "Because our area is growing so quickly, there is a need for a more capable, local, caring institution that handles families in crisis."

Darr said the group hopes that the state funding will come through. In the meantime, WINGS will launch a campaign in April to raise \$2 million in the next few years to cover operating costs.

The presence of shelters such as the WINGS safe house runs counter to the notion that the suburban lifestyle is as idyllic as that portrayed in 1950s television sitcoms, Kirk said.

"The old fantasy of suburban life as Ozzie and Harriet is sometimes not true," he said. "We need a public-private partnership such as WINGS to care for mothers, wives and children."

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